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THE SECRET OF JAPANESE SUCCESS

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No one can contemplate the state of society in Japan previous to the arrival of Commodore Perry without being profoundly impressed with its singular and in many respects its great qualities. The government commonly spoken of as the Tokugawa régime was the culmination and flower of the feudal system, but it differed from feudalism in Europe in many important points not the least of which was the entirely peaceful character of this period. From the earliest times to the rule of Iyeyasu about the year 1600 Japan was a rude and incoherent feudalism, clan vying with clan and faction with faction. Even when a peaceful condition was established in this earlier period it only lasted until some combination of clans could be made strong enough to overthrow the ruling clan. There was no stable equilibrium of powers in the country. But with the rise of Nobunaga about 1573 and Hideyoshi in 1587 the rival clans were reduced to submission and finally under the leadership of the greatest statesman that Japan ever produced, the Shogun Iyeyasu, the government was so firmly established that no important insurrection again took place until the shogunate was overthrown in 1868.

From the year 1600 to the end of the middle of the nineteenth century the institutions of Japan had a peaceful and for the most part an indigenous development. All foreigners were rigidly excluded and foreign trade forbidden with the exception of a few Dutch and Chinese ships at a single port. Iyeyasu reorganized the government on lines of ancient Japanese customs and traditions. The local clans with their lords, or daimyos, he confirmed in their pos-

sessions, but he reserved portions of territory for his own immediate retainers—the hatamoto—and distributed their lands in such a way that no daimyo could easily combine with neighboring clans for revolt. Later every daimyo was required to spend a certain portion of his time at the court of the shogan in Yedo, the capital city. The people below the rulers were divided into four classes, the highest being the knights or samurai, next the farmers, then the artisans and lowest the merchants. No member of one class, with rare exceptions, could enter the other class. Each class was carefully guarded as well as restricted in its privileges. The civilized world has never witnessed a like condition of peaceful development, of the supremacy of the state, of loyalty to the state, from the lowest to the highest, of a coherent and compact nation.

With the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate after a brief struggle in 1868 and the collapse of the feudal system a few years later the modern era of Japan began. Step by step the process of modernization went on. The railway, the telegraph, the postal system, the reorganization of the army and navy, the development of foreign commerce, the establishment of a banking system, the abolition of feudal land tenures and the substitution of absolute ownership, the creation of a representative government, a cabinet administration responsible directly to the Emperor, all these reforms took place successively. New law codes in place of ancient customary law, a general system of primary, secondary and university education, all these and many other reforms were accomplished with a minimum of friction and a maximum of effect. It is a wonderful story, it is even more astonishing to the accurate student than to the casual observer. In some cases, I believe, the Japanese have exhibited more wisdom than their immediate foreign advisers who in the first instance were employed to aid them in the process of transformation. For instance under American advice in 1871 they introduced the American national banking system. It took the Japanese less than ten years to discover that this system was so faulty as to be useless for their purposes. The government sent a board of inquiry abroad to

study the various banking systems of foreign countries. This board patiently considered the most important banking organizations in existence and in an exhaustive report decided in favor of a bank on the model of the Bank of Belgium. In 1882 the Nippon Ginko—the great Central Bank of Japan—was organized with a view to replacing ultimately the national banking system of earlier date. This great bank has been of inestimable service in providing credit for Japanese industries and financing war loans at critical periods. When one remembers how poor in capital Japan is and what demands were made to carry on the war with Russia it must be evident that she must have had an excellent banking system to have withstood all danger of panic or commercial disaster. The Bank of Japan is the effective life principle of her entire credit system. Under the older national banking system it is doubtful whether she could have met the enormous war expenditures successfully.

This transition from a feudal organization of society to the modern régime including the successful prosecution of two great wars is the problem to be solved. What is the secret of Japan's success in so many fields of modern endeavor in competition with countries which have had the advantage of longer experience and larger accumulation of wealth? Are we here in the presence of an unparalleled phenomenon—a miracle in the evolution of nations—or can we trace the success of the Japanese to some principle of consistent growth, such as we find among some of the nations of the West?

Much may be said in favor of a theory advanced with some plausibility and force that the difference between the conditions of feudalism and those of the restoration is far less than we are apt to imagine. Modern scholars who have studied minutely the institutions of the feudal régime in Japan find in them the germ of nearly every modern institution. For instance representative government was thoroughly understood and practiced in the farming villages of Japan.¹ The Tokugawa government not only permitted

¹ See *Notes on Village Government in Japan after 1600*, by K. Asakawa, New Haven, Conn.

this form of local self-government but fostered it, and as a rule gave it unstinted support when in conflict with other jurisdictions. The same sort of self-government was practiced in the guilds, the five family group (Kumi) and in the family councils. From this circumstance we may conclude that the present prefectural assemblies representing the people of a given prefecture or even the national parliament are not an anomalous institution in Japan. The people were thoroughly familiar with the idea of a form of self-government and it needed only a slight modification to suit new conditions to make them thoroughly at home in it. In some respects the old feudal government was more inclined to favor the local autonomy than is the present government. It was the policy of the Tokugawa administration to throw off as much responsibility as possible wherever it was entirely safe to do so. If we examine other existing institutions, political, economic or educational, we may trace the nucleus of their existence to the feudal period. Banking of a sort was well established at that time. Bills of exchange, promissory notes and even checks, all on a limited scale as befitted a country without foreign commerce, were made use of. For the government at Yedo there was communication throughout the Empire carried on by runners with such effect that Kaempfer who was in Japan toward the end of the seventeenth century was astounded at its rapidity. Schools and higher institutions of learning were to some degree fostered. Department stores were by no means unknown in the feudal era. The samurai or knights were perhaps the most loyal and courageous body of soldiers that the world has ever known. Thus nearly every institution which Japan is supposed to have borrowed from the West existed in some form in this earlier period. The civilization of the Tokugawa period was in many ways a most complete and finished product.² So far from being wanting in the arts and refinements of a cultured civilization it would be easy to prove that for at least a considerable body of the people refinement toward the end of the Tokugawa period had progressed at the expense

² For a summary of the achievements of the feudal period, see *Feudal and Modern Japan*, by A. M. Knapp.

of vigor. About the middle of the nineteenth century Japanese reformers were attacking the luxury of the rulers and the decadence of the arts.

From this point of view then we have in the transition of Japan from feudalism to the restoration only a natural evolution, a transformation from the simple to the complex, from the less developed to the more developed, a growth without a serious break or strain. This interpretation accords with the modern doctrine of historical continuity, of social cause and effect and beyond question it throws much light upon some difficult phases of Japan's ready acceptance of certain reforms. The Japanese by their earlier experience and training, by their familiarity in the feudal period with economic and political problems were not the naïve and primitive people we at first imagined them to be, but rather a sophisticated people who needed only a slight impulse to appreciate the advantages of Western civilization, its larger scale, its more efficient processes and on the whole its greater opportunities for the individual. At the same time this mode of interpretation does not explain the striking and continuous success of the Japanese in the past thirty years, whether in the domain of politics or diplomacy, industry or finance, education or science, and last but not least of war whether by land or sea. The Japanese have exhibited a singular sagacity or common-sense which we have generally supposed to be exclusively our own possession or at least the possession of Occidentals. The many international complications of the past twenty years have shown that their capacity for meeting emergencies has painfully shocked some of the European governments and even caused the latter to sound an alarm of the "Yellow Peril."

The secret of Japanese success is I believe to be found in the relation of the Japanese to the structure of their society. The unit of Western society is the individual, however technically the definition of the individual may be construed for political or other purposes. In Japan under the feudal system both in theory and practice the individual was a subordinate consideration. The unit of society was the family. Nor must we understand by this term merely the

family in the Western sense of the word. In Japan the family may consist of sixty or seventy persons—it consists of all those who worship at the same family shrine. A family may consist of an entire village. From birth to death the affairs of each member of the family are regulated by the family—and in important cases by the family council. No Japanese would think of securing an education, of choosing a vocation, of spending his leisure, of taking a wife, or of leaving home on his own initiative. Such an act would be to him incomprehensible. Every act of every individual is determined not by himself but by the decrees of his family. It has been said that Japan is a paradise for children. No doubt children are petted and have their own way in that country to a much greater extent than with us, but only because it is understood that as soon as they get beyond the age of childhood their life-long discipline begins. The family never dies, it is perpetual, it is not a contractual institution, it is a religious commonwealth. No member of the family, not even the oldest, is free from the bonds of family discipline. If a debt is contracted by a member of the family it is assumed by all and in the feudal era might be an obligation imposed upon the family for generations. In every properly constituted household is a family shrine—either Shinto or Buddhist—at which each member worships daily.

In the institution of the patriarchal family the Japanese are not exceptional; the same institution is found in the early Aryan civilizations, as in early Greece and Rome the family was an all powerful and equally despotic commonwealth in which the liberty of the individual member was rigidly restricted. What is exceptional in the case of Japan is the fact that the patriarchal family has been maintained to within recent years and even at the present time is a vigorous institution compared with which our Western family institution is but a feeble relic. We may see in Japan at the present moment many social customs and institutions which have ceased to exist in Europe since the early Greek and Roman civilization.³

³ Cf. Ferrero's *Greatness and Decline of Rome*, Ch. 1. The analogies in some instances are striking.

Next in importance to the Japanese family, with its rigid discipline controlling the daily life of every member, was the power of the community over each family. As every household worshipped at the family shrine so the village community worshipped at the village Shinto shrine, set up usually in the outskirts of the village. The rule of the community over its inhabitants was supplementary to and quite as severe as the rule of the household over each of its members. And the thinking of the community was singularly homogeneous. To displease one was to displease all and the punishment for any serious infraction of the laws or customs of the community was terrible. To disobey one's parents for instance was not only to oppose the united will of the family but to run counter to the will of the community—it meant social ostracism, a far more effective weapon than severe corporal punishment. In extreme cases a person could be banished and that was in old Japan complete degradation and misery. Such a person could not go elsewhere because no family would receive him and he had no personal existence save as a member of a family. He generally became a *hinin*, a no-man, doomed to consort with the outcasts of society, beggars, strolling singers or jugglers.

Lastly every Japanese was trained in loyalty to his government and country. The technical profession of military loyalty was in the hands of the large class of samurai and to this class loyalty was not only a life career, but a religious rite with an elaborate ceremony. The discipline of a samurai was extraordinarily severe. Its puritanism in many ways exceeded that of any military order that ever existed. The code, written or unwritten, demanded sobriety, self-control, instant obedience. A samurai was a man of few words, simple and stoical tastes, and of the severest sense of honor. He believed that to him was entrusted the ultimate destiny of his country and his daily conduct, it was thought, should reflect that sense of responsibility. His children from their earliest youth were trained in the same school of stoic simplicity and laborious exercise. A samurai was not expected to show affection even to his wife and children or parents.

His wife was dignified sufficiently in being his wife and loyally conformed to the harsh conditions.

But loyalty was a duty not only of the samurai but was equally taught to and practiced by all classes. For instance the taxpayers were the farmers who paid their dues in rice, and judging by Western standards we might suppose that the farmers assumed this burden with some reluctance. But the farmers as a rule not only paid their taxes with alacrity but selected the best rice of the crop for their rulers. Tax-day was much more a festival than a day of gloom. Loyalty of some sort whether to the lord of the clan or to the shogun, or to the emperor, was part and parcel of the life of most Japanese. During the peaceful period of the shogunate, beginning with 1600, this loyalty expanded to far wider limits than had existed in the war-like years previous to 1600, but even under the Bakufu there were certain narrowing restrictions. Since the downfall of the last shogun in 1868, loyalty has had a national scope of which the Emperor is the center and soul.

This brief and fragmentary outline of Japanese society is given merely to show that the essential idea of the social structure in Japan under the feudal system was a strict subordination of individuals to groups and of both to the state. Such an idea as personal liberty never entered the minds of the Japanese whether rulers or ruled. Every person was supposed to have his proper place in the social organization and to be satisfied with that place.⁴ The people accepted this arrangement without question or doubt, and for the most part even unconsciously, inasmuch as it had its origin in a religious system that had existed from prehistoric times. Every individual had a secure niche, but the security was dependent upon perfect obedience to the system. It is often stated from our pulpits that religion is more a life than a creed, but in Japan it was all life, the creed was never formulated except in the writings of a few philosophers. Strangers in Japan are wont to express surprise at the placidity of all classes, their amiable humor and good manners. The Japan-

⁴ Cf. *The Legacy of Iyeyasu* where this view is strictly maintained.

ese seem to have little anxiety as to their morals or conduct. By contrast our own state of mind is one of worry. Some time ago there was an article written, I believe by Maeterlinck, on the subject of "Our Anxious Morality," as though we were in a state of uncertainty as to whether any individual would turn out to be a success or a failure in his conduct. In Japan there is much less of this for the simple reason that the social discipline and force of opinion as embodied in the habits and institutions of the people are so powerful that no one can escape them.

The system imposed a continuous discipline upon all classes of people. According to the *Legacy of Iyeyasu*, a document of immense importance in the government of the Tokugawa period, judges should be more lenient in condemning infractions of the law by the humble and poor than by the rich and powerful. The feudal society was aristocratic to the core but it demanded that each class live up to its status and privileges. In the 50th and 51st articles of this *Legacy* concerning adultery he states: "The upper classes are expected to know better than to occasion disturbance for violating existing regulations; and such persons, breaking the laws by lewd, trifling or illicit intercourse shall at once be punished without deliberation or consultation. It is not the same in this case as in the case of farmers, artisans or traders." In article 88 speaking of debauchery, it is declared that "it should be judged and punished according to the degree in which it constitutes a bad example for the lower classes." Each person from the lowest to the highest was expected to conform his conduct to certain conditions imposed upon his class. The mere spectator or man of leisure was not provided for. Hence a Japanese family reared in the old style is made up of a group of persons all engaged in busy employment, each with his or her allotted task performing the duties of the day willingly and cheerfully.

Lastly the sentiment of loyalty was a bond of union uniting each with the interests of all. Filial piety is the greatest virtue of children and loyalty the greatest virtue of the elders. Under the feudal régime to die for one's lord is not an act of sacrifice, it is an act of duty. Under the modern constitu-

tion it is a sense of obligation to advance the welfare of the country. Patriotism is not only a strong sentiment in Japan, it is a quasi-religious institution. The sense of the state is extraordinarily developed,⁵ thus contrasting vividly with the conditions in China where the sense of the state has been almost non-existent. Every step of progress in Japan during the past forty years has been attained by government action and the people have in the great majority of instances loyally supported their government. In Corea and China where loyalty to the government as an instrument of promoting the common welfare is relatively feeble, there are factions swayed by foreign interests—the Russian party, or the English party. But who has ever heard of a Japanese faction under the sway of a foreign power? Such a faction would be instantly condemned by public opinion. There is in the structure of Japanese society not a crack or cranny in which any foreign interest can insert its disintegrating wedge. The Japanese will accept foreign institutions, their science and inventions, with avidity but only to the extent, as they understand it, of leaving the social organization intact. What secondary influences these foreign innovations will exert in the future it would be hard to state. It must be admitted that Japan is bound to face difficulties in the future arising from her economic transformation greater even than those of the past and calling for all the resources of her statesmanship and patriotism.

Thus far at least Japan has done wonders in all the fields of modern endeavor. At present America is torn by conflicting opinions as to the best method of regulating the enormous aggregations of capital. Are we in any position to give advice to Japan—as we did forty years ago—on this intricate problem. Have we any ability to spare for the service of any other government when our own government seems absolutely helpless in the face of these powerful combina-

⁵ Iyeyasu is credited with the saying "The world is the world's world and not one man's." So also Uesugi Harunori, Lord of Tonezawa said: "The State has been transmitted by our forefathers and should not be exploited for selfish purposes. The people belong to the State and should not be exploited for selfish purposes."

tions? Yet Japan has met this difficulty in at least one instance with directness and courage. Some years ago the American Tobacco Company secured practically a monopoly of the tobacco manufacturing business of Japan by buying out the principal tobacco manufacturers. It was quite evident to the Japanese that this business was in the grip of a trust and without much delay or hesitation the Japanese government urged and secured legislation permitting it to buy up all the tobacco manufacturing interests and converting the private into a government monopoly. Since then I do not know of another combination of capital of the same sort. "Why this is socialism" some Americans will exclaim. I can give the absolute assurance that no country is less socialistic than Japan. She simply met an issue as it stood, without any extensive theorizing beyond the acknowledged principle that governments are instituted to maintain the general welfare. Japan took hold of the industrial monopoly problem in the same manner that she met the banking problem.

Foreigners who have lived a few months, or even years, in Japan are likely to underestimate the strength of the Japanese merely because the individual Japanese often seems to be unable to cope with the individual American or Englishman of the same standing or occupation. The strength of the individual Japanese does not lie particularly in his own self reliance and ability. Standing alone he is likely to be wanting in a sense of certainty, independence and power. But the inference from this observation is often mistaken. The Japanese soldier is capable because he is part of a cohesive system which by inheritance he trusts. His own death does not trouble him—he recognizes that he is only a fraction of a larger group. When the war with China broke out it was confidently prophesied by many foreigners who had only a superficial knowledge of the Japanese, that the Chinese would be victorious. These foreigners overlooked the fact that the Japanese army had behind it an organized government second to none in the world, while China though superior in resources and men, was wanting in the very elements of such a government.

Japanese scholars who have made a comparative study of

Japanese and Western institutions are well aware of the wide differences between the two types and admit the advantages and disadvantages of both. But they all inevitably tend to accept their own type, with all its defects, as making for success in competition with foreign nations. We may quote in support of this view the opinions of Professor Junjiro Takakusu, Director of the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages. He says: "What is the secret of the corporate unity and oneness of spirit of Japanese soldiers and their remarkable discipline? What is the reason for the superior sanitation and commissary arrangements of our army? What is the reason for the utter scorn of death, which seems almost animal-like and that passionate patriotism which possess us. And finally what is the reason for the absolute security of military secrets. We must confess that looked at one by one we are weak but when massed together we are stronger than Western soldiers. And furthermore we Japanese have not only assimilated Western knowledge and mechanisms, but we have improved upon them in not a few cases, as for instance the Shimose gunpowder, the Murata rifle, the Arisaka gun and the Kimura wireless telephone. Our Red Cross Society while at first copied from the West, has attained a unique pitch of perfection and our relief of soldiers' families, our system of information, our care of prisoners of war and our issuing of government bonds, have all demonstrated that we can subordinate private and personal interests to public welfare, so that it is not too much to say that among the peoples of the world we are considered in this respect to be an ideal army and nation." (From the *International Journal of Ethics*, October, 1906.) He then gives his answer to this question. "The primary cause for all these phenomena is that in Japan the family is the unit whereas in the West the individual is the unit of society." And by family Professor Takakusu means not an institution in our sense of the word—but rather the family in its original and patriarchal sense. "In Japan," he adds, "the family system leads to mutual succor and mutual coöperation on the part of all those who are at all connected with it. The honor and glory of the house are the first concern of all. If there

is want in one section it is made up by another. And these families gathered together into groups, make a village, and groups of villages infinitely multiplied make a corporate nation. . . . It is this principle of mutual obligation which has given birth to Bushido and to the spirit of patriotism. A parent whose son is killed, although at first he may be inclined to rush to help yet will grit his teeth and say like Masaoka, 'It is for the sake of my lord and master,' that is for the state. When a telegram comes from army headquarters telling of the death of a husband on the battlefield, it is this spirit that makes wives rejoice that their husbands have fulfilled a soldier's duty. And from this same principle have come the wonderful military discipline, the contempt of death, the *esprit de corps*, the scarcity of Russian spies."

It may be asked whether a social structure in which the individual is so strictly subordinated to the group, whether the group be the family, the community or the nation, is as capable of developing the interesting qualities of life as is a form of society in which the individual has more play. This is a difficult question. Human nature adapts itself to varying conditions and resents any change unless it is stirred by a keen sense of wrong or by a passionate aspiration for the right. The average human being is far more inclined to accept revolution than reform, because the former can be accomplished by an abandonment to enthusiasm while the latter calls for the cooler qualities of investigation and mature judgment. But it has always seemed to me that the life of the ordinary Japanese, hemmed in by social barriers of ancient origin, limited by a severe social discipline, must be a dull affair compared with life in the freer West. But on the other hand a Japanese appreciates far more than the average American the small increments of freedom which he is permitted to enjoy. And even this freedom he attains only after a long apprenticeship to a severe discipline. A Japanese finds it difficult to cast off restraints—the social discipline is likely to be a weight which he cannot readily throw off. His moments of spontaneous good fellowship are fewer than with us. He is often secretive or ceremonious where an

American would be open and human. For in the end he knows that he may not follow his own judgment but will have to be obedient to another and greater power. It often happens that the spontaneous friendliness which has existed between an American teacher and his Japanese student is converted a year or two after graduation into a strictly formal relation. The young man has become part of a social mechanism—he is no longer free to say or do what he likes or even to cultivate the friendships he wishes. For him *Roma locuta est*.

But on the other hand no one can withhold his admiration from a people who are willing whenever the call is made to subordinate private to public interests. There are many notable examples of this trait in the past fifty years, none perhaps greater than the surrender of the feudal fiefs in 1871 by the daimyos to the Emperor. It was an act of supreme sacrifice of a powerful yet partial interest for the good of the whole. Hundreds of the feudal lords were reduced to comparative poverty and millions of their retainers lost their ordinary means of subsistence. Five years later the samurai yielded their right of wearing two swords—almost as great an act of renunciation as the surrender of the fiefs. Even the Bakufu government in 1868 made but a feeble resistance when it was once understood that public opinion was in favor of its abdication. During the more recent period of the Restoration there are many instances of the same kind. There is no private interest in Japan sufficiently powerful to antagonize the interest of the state. When it became evident after the war with Russia that the railways of Japan must be owned and operated by the government in order to maintain her military efficiency, the transfer from private hands to the government was completed in a short period of time without much controversy or friction. This principle that all private interests must conform to the general good will in the end, I believe, be a solvent of all future economic issues of Japan and keep it in the very forefront of civilized nations.

The secret of Japanese success is their social solidarity, their oneness of aim and purpose, their cohesion of interests,

and above all their faith in the supremacy of their government, as an instrument of the common welfare.

To turn for a moment from Japan to our own country. No one can fail to note the confusion of private interests at present in America, the chaotic advice, the uncertainty of any constructive policy by the government. The leaders of commercial and industrial enterprises are dissatisfied with the existing conditions and yet make no suggestion for a more rational policy. Unrestrained monopoly cannot be tolerated, yet every restriction is met by bitter opposition and criticism. Are we inferior to the Japanese in patriotism, in capacity or in public spirit? Is our love of private gain so overmastering that it cannot yield to a more generous sentiment? The policy of "jamming things through," in America, whatever the obstacles may be, may produce a few leaders of capacity and power, but their gain must ultimately be the nation's loss. In such men the sense of the state is atrophied. They do not perceive the cohesion of interests, the interrelation of parts, and resent any suggestion that their activities must be subordinated to larger considerations.⁶ To such men the Japanese point of view would be devoid of vitality and adventure. Such men are blind to the secret of Japanese success.

⁶ On this point see *The Future in America*, by H. G. Wells.